

### THE BIRMINGHAM CONVENTION.

It is my deliberate judgment that the Laymen's Missionary Convention held in Birmingham last week was the greatest gathering of any kind ever held in the Southern Presbyterian church. It was great in numbers. There were four or five times as many delegates present as attend the General Assembly of our Church. Eleven hundred and thirty-two properly accredited delegates were registered—and the great majority of them came the first day and remained to the end. Of these between two hundred and fifty and three hundred were ministers and the rest laymen. They came from all parts of the South. A more representative body never assembled in our church. Some of the old patriarchs among our ministers were there. The young theologues were there. Bankers and judges and merchants and manufacturers came. Bookkeepers and clerks and stenographers sat by their sides. The metropolitan church was represented. The small country church had its delegate. The great majority of delegates were in the prime of middle age or young manhood.

It was great in enthusiasm. I have never seen a body so full of enthusiasm unless it was the great Democratic convention in Chicago in 1896, which nominated Mr. Bryan after his "cross of gold" speech, and that was a very different kind of enthusiasm. I am afraid that some of the fathers in the church will be a bit shocked when they hear of the fact that there was frequent applause and cheering. The truth is they cheered everything but the prayers. I heard a round of applause when John 3:16 was quoted. There was an outburst of applause at the close of the great hymn, "All hail the power of Jesus name." I say I am afraid the fathers would be shocked, and yet some of the fathers were there and they did not seem to be shocked. There was something so sincere, so natural, so spontaneous, so spiritual about it all that it seemed to be a proper way to express love and loyalty and devotion to the Master. Never have I seen a gathering more loyal to Him.

I believe it will be great in its influence. Indeed I believe this convention is going to be more far-reaching in its influence than any convention or gathering ever held within the bounds of our church. No doubt some of the enthusiasm will fade as the delegates get back to their daily work and cares, but after we have made due allowance for that, this multitude of men will carry back to their home a great deal of the fire and enthusiasm that burned in that great convention. Here I am, back in my study with work piled high all around me, the last three nights have had precious little sleep, Sunday is staring me in the face, a sermonless Sunday, and yet with all these things to drown enthusiasm, I know that there is a new fire in my heart. I have no doubt that there are 1,131 other delegates who could give the same testimony.

It is impossible to give any adequate idea of this great convention to the man who was not there, and yet at the request of the editors I will try at least to give a few of the outstanding features. Let us begin at the beginning.

During the whole of Tuesday delegates and visitors were pouring into Birmingham from all parts of the South. In a number of cases there were special trains and special cars. Religious services were held on some

of these trains as they sped on their way to the convention city. Birmingham is a splendid city and has excellent hotel accommodations, but by Tuesday night all her space was filled. I hunted for more than an hour for a place to sleep and then got it only by the skin of my teeth.

#### On Tuesday.

The convention assembled on Tuesday afternoon. We may pause just here for a moment and look at the hall. It is the city auditorium. The first floor will seat about two thousand people. The galleries will seat two thousand more. Only the delegates were admitted to the first floor. Visitors went to the galleries. It was a great sight to sit and look down into the faces of twelve hundred good, strong Christian men, and then lift your eyes to the galleries and see there two thousand more of the choicest Christian men and women of Birmingham and the South. A delegate near me said, "I never saw so many Christian men together in all my life." I agreed with him. In one end of the auditorium hung the largest missionary map in the world. From the galleries there were suspended the flags of all the heathen lands in which we have missionary work. The Stars and Stripes were also in evidence. Suspended here and there were banners bearing striking missionary mottoes. Near the entrance there was a post office, writing room, information bureau, prayer-room, telephones, and all the conveniences heart could desire.

Governor B. B. Comer, of Alabama, gave a cordial address of welcome to the delegates. Ex-Governor R. B. Glenn, of North Carolina, presided. Just here I may say that Governor Glenn made a most excellent presiding officer and soon won the hearts of the convention. He had to leave on Wednesday night for Louisville, where he was to fire one of the first guns in a great temperance campaign in Kentucky. When he made that announcement he was cheered to the echo. It was easy to see what the convention thought on the temperance question and what it thought of Governor Glenn.

As he took his leave he said: "I have had the honor of presiding over many conventions. It was the proudest moment of my life when I was asked to preside over the convention of governors in Washington City. But I can truly say that I count it the greatest honor I have ever had in my life to have presided over this convention," and he looked as if he meant it.

Mr. J. Campbell White made the first address of the afternoon. He spoke of "the significance of this convention." I suppose we all know by this time that Mr. White is the General Secretary of the Laymen's Movement in America. He belongs to the United Presbyterian Church, and was for ten years a missionary in India.

He and Dr. W. W. White, of the Bible School in New York, are brothers. They have a no less distinguished sister, who is the wife of Mr. John R. Mott, the man who has done more for the college students of the world than any living person. Mr. White is a native of Ohio and got his fine physique out on the farm. It stands him in good stead now when he is under such tremendous pressure all the time. A statement which is not generally known was made on the platform on the closing night. It is that Mr. White is supported by a beloved